

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 DACCA 01920 291058Z
ACTION NEA-10

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AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
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CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 1920

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, BG
SUBJECT: ZIA CONTEMPLATING GOVERNMENT CHANGES

1. ACCORDING TO MASHIUR RAHMAN, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL AWAMI PARTY/BHASHANI (NAP/B), PRESIDENT ZIA HAS DECIDED TO ABOLISH HIS COUNCIL OF ADVISORS AND SUBSTITUTE A COUNCIL OF MINISTERS, INCLUDING IN THE NEW BODY A NUMBER O POLITICIANS WHO WOULD JOIN SOME OF THE PRESENT ADVISORS TO FORM AN INTERIM NATIONAL GOVERNMENT UNTIL PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS CAN BE HELD NOVEMBER 30. THESE CHANGES AND OTHERS MAY BE ANNOUNCED IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS, SAID MASHIUR, WHO TOLD POLOFF YESTERDAY IN THE STRICTEST CONFIDENCE THAT ZIA HAD SIGNED AN "AGREEMENT" ON THESE DETAILS IN THE EARLY HOURS OF MARCH 27.

2. THE AGREEMENT, BETWEEN MASHIUR AND ZIA AND WITNESSED
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 DACCA 01920 291058Z

BY RETIRED BRIG. NURUL ISLAM "SHISHU", SUPPOSEDLY CALLS FOR
ZIA TO ANNOUNCE:

- A. A COUNCIL OF MINISTERS AS AN INTERIM GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY. ZIA WOULD CONTINUE TO PRESIDEN AND ATAUR RAHMAN KHAN WOULD BE NAMED CHIEF MINISTER (OR PRIME MINISTER);
- B. APOLITICAL FRONT, ACTING IN ZIA'S BEHALF, WHICH

WOULD INCLUDE NAP/B, ATA'S JATIYA LEAGUE, THE UNITED PEOPLE'S PARTY (UPP), JAGODAL AND INDIVIDUALS FROM THE MUSLIM LEAGUE (SUCH AS GENERAL SECRETARY SHAH AZIZUR RAHMAN) AND THE BANNED DEMOCRATIC LEAGUE. REPRESENTATIVES FROM EACH OF THESE PARTIES WOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE PROPOSED COUNCIL OF MINISTERS;

C. PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS ON NOVEMBER 30 OR SHORTLY THEREAFTER.

3. ACCORDING TO MASHIUR, ZIA STILL IS CONSIDERING HOLDING A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN THE NEXT TWO MONTHS, USING AS HIS PLATFORM CERTAIN CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES TO ANNUAL THE FOURTH AMENDMENT ADDED TO THE 1972 CONSTITUTION BY SHEIKH MUJIB IN 1975. TO FACILITATE A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, ZIA MAY LIFT THE BAN ON POLITICAL ACTIVITIES IN MID-APRIL AFTER RETURNING FROM HIS UPCOMING TRIP TO JAPAN. ZIA MAY ALSO RESIGN THE CHIEF OF ARMY STAFF POSITION IN MID-APRIL, NAMING MAJOR GENERAL H.G. ERSHAD, NOW DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF, TO THE POSITION. ZIA HAS REPORTEDLY OBTAINED MAJOR GENERAL MIR SHAWKAT ALI'S AGREEMENT TO THE CHANGE (ALTHOUGH SHAWKAT AS GOC OF THE 55TH INFANTRY DIVISION IS KNOWN TO WANT THE JOB BADLY).

4. MASHIRU SAID ALSO THAT PROF. G.W. CHOWDHURY, NOW TEACHING AT NORTH CAROLINA CENTRAL UNIVERSITY AND A FORMER MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS IN THE AYUB CABINET, HAD

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 DACCA 01920 291058Z

BEEN BROUGHT BACK TO DACCA IN THE LAST FEW DAYS TO HELP DRAFT ZIA'S PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES. ONE OF CHOWDHURY'S PRINCIPAL ASSISTANTS REPORTEDLY WILL BE DR. MIZANUR RAHMAN "SHELLEY", A FORMER STUDENT OF CHOWDHURY'S NOW DIRECTOR OF THE SOCIAL WELFARE DIVISION OF THE MINISTRY OF LABOR AND AN EXPERT IN CONSTITUTIONAL LAW. (POLCOUNSELOR MET YESTERDAY WITH CHOWDHURY AND ANOTHER SENIOR OFFICIAL, WHOSE INFORMATION GENERALLY CONFIRMED MANY OF ABOVE POINTS.)

5. FROM SEVERAL OTHER SOURCES, WE HAVE HEARD THAT MASHIUR RAHMAN HAS BEEN MEETING REGULARLY WITH ZIA AND HAS ASSUMED THE ROLE OF A MEDIATOR BETWEEN ZIA AND A NUMBER OF POLITICIANS WILLING TO WORK WITH ZIA PROVIDED HE ACCEPTED THEIR THREE LONG-STANDING DEMANDS: FIRM DATE OF ELECTION, OPEN POLITICS AND ANNULMENT OF THE FOURTH AMENDMENT WHICH ALLOWS VIRTUAL PRESIDENTIAL DICTATORSHIP. ALL OF THESE DEMANDS SEEM TO BE MET IN THE ALLEGED "AGREEMENT".

6. ZIA IS NOT KNOWN FOR HASTY DECISIONS, WHICH THIS APPEARS AT FIRST TO BE, BUT IT BECOMING CLEAR TO MANY OBSERVERS THAT ZIA IS SKATING ON THIN ICE POLITICALLY, AS

THE PARTY ORGANIZED ON HIS BEHALF, JAGODAL, HAS FAILED BY
ITSELF TO ATTRACT MUCH INTEREST. IT MUST ALSO BE CLEAR
TO ZIA THAT HE MUST MAKE SOME DECISIVE MOVE SOON. IF THE
ABOVE INFORMATION IS ACCURATE, WHAT MAY HAVE NOW DRAWN THE
POLITICIANS' INTEREST TO A LARGER POLITICAL FRONT IS THE
CHANCE TO PARTICIPATE IN A COUNCIL OF MINISTERS AND,
PROBABLY MORE IMPORTANT, ZIA'S APPARENT WILLINGNESS, FOR THE
FIRST
TIME, TO MEET THE POLITICIANS' DEMANDS. ZIA IS ALSO
A CAUTIOUS MAN, AND AT THE LAST MOMENT HE MAY DECIDE
TO POSTPONE HIS PLANS, BUT IF HE DOES SO, HE WILL LOSE
FACE WITH THE FEW POLITICIANS WHO ARE WILLING TO
ASSOCIATE WITH HIM.
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PAGE 04 DACCA 01920 291058Z

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